

pearance that it may have of inconsistency with previous knowledge, is wholly superficial, and soon passes away.

We believe that the present unfortunate state of philosophy is due in a high degree to a wrong conception of the problem offered by philosophy, and of the proper method of its solution. It can hardly be said that philosophy has uniformly accepted any thing for granted, unless it be the validity of the deductive process. It has more and more distinctly proposed to itself the task of putting secure foundations under all knowledge; or, if the more modest expression be preferred, of discovering the secure foundations that underlie all knowledge. If this effort is understood to exclude all postulates of all sorts, to start in clear and complete knowledge, and to carry the light of primary principles through to the very end, it involves an impossible and irrational effort. Its results so far have sufficiently shown its impossibility. The point we now urge is its irrationality. It is the office of reason—using the word to cover all our highest powers of comprehension—in its ultimate action, not to turn all things into knowledge, but to disclose the necessary limits of knowledge, to discover what is rational and what is irrational in inquiry, and to see those restrictions which arise from the nature of mind, and to satisfy itself with them. Reason is not a kind of omniscience, before whose vision all things must become transparent. The highest function of reason is expressed in its power to satisfy itself with the unknown, provided that it is the unknown simply by lying on the limits of the horizon, simply by being a first term which must be conceded as a condition to a second term. Reason does not overleap itself, nor deem the effort to do so any other than the irrational thing which it is.

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# PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

JOHN BASCOM

AUTHOR OF "SCIENCE OF MIND," "GROWTH AND GRADES OF INTELLIGENCE," ETC.

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## PREFACE.

THIS volume may seem to be constructed on the idea of gathering up the fragments that nothing may be lost. This precept, however, wise as it often is, does not express the law of production in the present case. A few points in philosophy invited more clear or more thorough statement. This labor I chose to undertake directly and briefly, rather than to attempt it as a part of a more extended and systematic work. One evil in philosophy is the accumulation of fruitless discussions. A few positions fortunately taken may be easily lost in their practical value by the extended treatises which accompany them, traversing old ground with no sufficient reward. Philosophy, above most topics, calls for an explicit statement of a few fundamental principles, and a pushing of inquiry in reference to them, till some satisfactory conclusion is reached. The present volume aims to make, in the most direct way, a contribution on the more obscure topics of philosophy. What it has to say is not, taken collectively, extended, and may be still farther reduced by the reader by confining his attention to the one or more subjects which may appeal directly to him. Only one of these discussions—that on liberty—has appeared elsewhere, and that essay has been somewhat modified.

While the discussions now offered touch very closely the points at issue between the empirical and the intu-

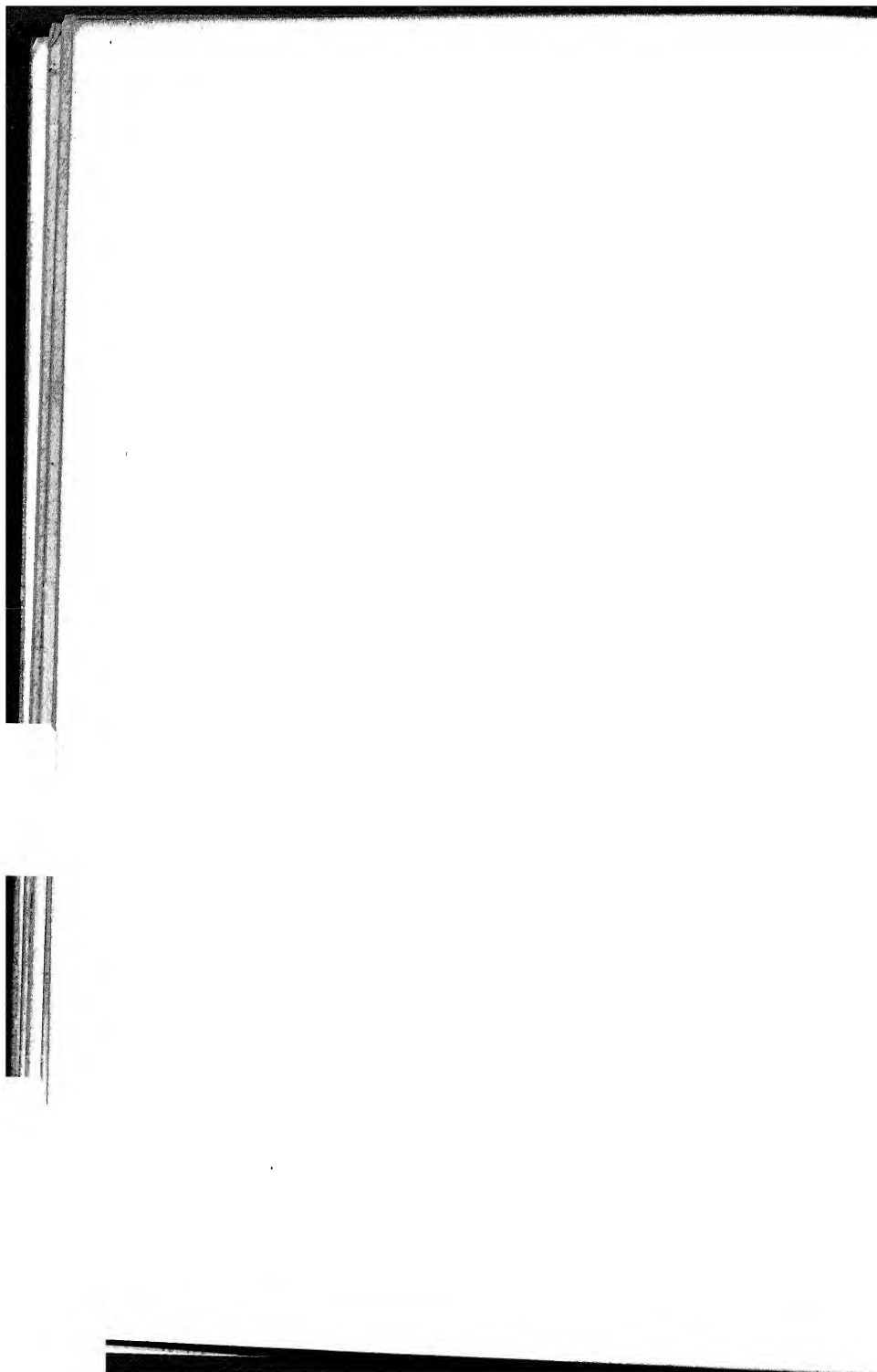
tive tendencies in philosophy, they are not conducted with any express conformity to either mode of inquiry. There is, in the consideration of these fundamental questions, a distinct recognition of the fact that the phenomena of mind cannot find a rational substratum of thought within themselves as phenomena merely; and also a recognition of the fact that it is these very phenomena, and these only, that call for explanation. The effort has been, therefore, to bring appropriate ideas to the interpretation of mental facts, as broadly and fully contained in human experience.

Any obscurity that may attach to these discussions, while it may be due in part to a defective treatment, is also in part due to the unavoidable difficulty which attends on the concise handling of topics remote from familiar thought. The separation of each discussion involves occasionally a slight repetition, yet on the whole favors brevity.

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# PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY.

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## I.

### METHODS IN PHILOSOPHY.

A SURVEY of the products of human thought in philosophy impresses upon the mind some disagreeable conclusions. The most obvious of these is the extent and endless variety of the antagonism between systems of philosophy, and the hopelessly erratic character of many of these systems. When, however, we are about to draw the natural conclusion from such a result, that this field is either one of uncertainties, or one beyond the scope of our powers, we are led to observe that those who have expressed this opinion have not themselves adhered to it, but have frequently constructed theories, or given occasion to their construction, as extreme as the most extreme of those they have been intended to displace. Science has not for long rid itself of a metaphysic by scoffing at metaphysics, but has only led the way to one of a peculiarly difficult and untenable order. A certain fatality, or rather a supreme force of nature, is disclosed in thoughtful minds, driving them, sooner or later, more or less completely, within the charmed circle of philosophy. No amount of failure discourages the venturesome spirit of man from a new voyage of discovery in search of the poles of thought.

In studying the history of philosophy, we soon make a farther observation, that the course of speculation has not been without direction or without return, but has confined itself to a comparatively narrow and regular orbit, over which it has passed many times, including at each new circuit secondary points of correction and amplification. There is in this fact, wisely looked at, grounds of encouragement. It seems to disclose a position of nearest approach to the truth, as well as one of farthest remove from it; and it indicates that if the mind is not yet able to hold fast and complete the gains of the one relation, no more can it be satisfied with the losses of the other. It seems possible that the alarming eccentricity of the present orbit of revolution in philosophy may disappear, and there remain only that slight oscillation of human thought which combines the free and the stable.

The extravagance of conclusions in philosophy compared with those of any other field of inquiry, seems to arise from the fact that research in this department commences with no recognized limitations. From the very beginning it casts off, of set purpose, the ordinary conditions of inquiry, and proposes, in one composite process—initiated with little or no guidance—to define both the proper method and the sure results of speculation. Science has in hand for constant use all its cardinal ideas. It accepts as valid the ordinary experiences and the ordinary logic of life, and searches only for the conclusions which lie within them. Hence its processes are safely and easily tested, and its results are brought within that familiar circle which holds all our knowledge. A discovery in science may be fresh and surprising; it is not strange, incomprehensible, and contradictory. Any ap-